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## **COME COUNT BIRDS WITH A BUDDY IN GAUTIER!**

(Gautier, MS) – The ninth annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is taking place February 17-20, and the city of Gautier, Mississippi invites its local citizens to participate in this nationwide event for the third consecutive year. On Saturday, February 18, beginning at 9:00 a.m., the Mississippi Coast Audubon Society will host a bird identification clinic at Gautier High School, featuring a demonstration on how to participate in this fun birdwatching event. The clinic will begin with a brief ceremony to recognize the city of Gautier and Gautier High School for their participation in the GBBC for the previous two years – in 2005, Gautier residents submitted more checklists than any other U.S. town.

“The city of Gautier and Gautier High School have been wonderful partners and supporters of the GBBC over the past few years,” said Mark LaSalle, Coast Project Director for Audubon Mississippi. “They both have dedicated themselves to helping Audubon encourage children and families to embrace and enjoy birds and wildlife in their backyards and communities. Both the city and the high school embody the spirit of Citizen Science and community pride that we all share in this worthy cause.”

Run by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the GBBC invites individuals and families to “Count Birds with a Buddy” by observing the variety of bird species in their community. Participants note the highest number of each species they see at any one time and enter their sightings online at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc) to contribute to this nationwide and continent-wide mid-winter snapshot of birds across North America.

Additionally this year, the GBBC is partnering with Take Pride in America®, an organization within the Department of the Interior which encourages and recognizes volunteerism on public lands. Take Pride in America is encouraging participation in the GBBC to help to spread the message of stewardship and caring for our public lands across the country.

“Our partnership with the National Audubon Society in the Great Backyard Bird Count embodies the cooperative spirit of Take Pride. By individual citizens contributing to their local community, together, as a nation, we are joined through the efforts of volunteerism,” said Michelle Cangelosi, Executive Director of Take Pride.

Participation in the lower Mississippi region this year is particularly important, as this is the first opportunity that scientists with the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology will have to assess the effect that Hurricane Katrina might have had on local bird populations, and to observe the efforts to restore coastal bird habitat.

For more information about the GBBC or the clinic, please contact Mark LaSalle at 228-475-0825 or [mlasalle@audubon.org](mailto:mlasalle@audubon.org), or visit [www.msaudubon.org](http://www.msaudubon.org) or [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc).

*Audubon is dedicated to protecting birds and other wildlife and the habitat that supports them. Our national network of community-based nature centers and chapters, scientific and educational programs, and advocacy on behalf of areas sustaining important bird populations, engage millions of people of all ages and backgrounds in conservation.*

*Take Pride in America® is a partnership program that enables individuals, civic groups, corporations and others to volunteer in caring for public lands. Our goal is to instill in every citizen an active sense of ownership and responsibility for our natural, cultural and historic resources.*

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